

Air

for Unaccompanied Viola

by

Joshua Saulle

Composed for the San Francisco Conservatory

2006 Annual Viola Project

Program Note:

Air for Unaccompanied Viola is the product of the San Francisco Conservatory Composition Department's annual Viola Project, an extraordinary opportunity for the composition students to collaborate with viola students in creating new works for the instrument.

This piece was the direct result of a suggestion by a dear friend, to whom the work is dedicated, that my habit of composing by using a computer notation program and MIDI sequencer was becoming a crutch and causing me to lose touch with my inner ear. So I decided my next piece would be written entirely at the piano, with pencil and paper. And the result was quite surprising. The piece tumbled out in about three weeks (lightning quick by my standards), and I felt so satisfied with it after the first draft that I changed very little, only simplifying a few things to make the piece easier to play and more idiomatic.

In the process of writing a piece the "old-fashioned way", I also felt more deeply connected to and aware of what I was writing. I think this is the reason the piece came out to be so much about melody, harmony, form and lyricism.

Theoretically speaking, the main point of interest is in the use of a tritone substitution in place of a traditional dominant. Instead of Ab being the tonality that pulls the piece back to its tonic of Db, it is D major (the chord a tritone away from the dominant of Db) that either leads us away from Db at first, and then leads us back. Similarly, Ab is arrived at as a second stable key area by using its tritone substitution, A major.

For writing this piece, I must thank Josué Aceves for the suggestion that brought it all about, Jodi Levitz, Dan Becker and Felipe Gomez for organizing and producing the Viola Project, and Matthew Davies for all his help and expertise, and for a wonderful premiere.

Air for Unaccompanied Viola was premiered at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music on December 1, 2006.

A Word on Notation:

Throughout the piece, some double-stops contain small noteheads. These notes are to be considered optional depending on the ability of the performer, and should only be performed if they can be executed in performance easily and musically.

One or two places use a dashed slur or tie. This indicates that although a note will most probably need to be rearticulated, it should be done as smoothly as possible.

Duration ~ 8'

for Josué Angel Aceves

Air

for Unaccompanied Viola

Joshua Saulle

♩ = 70 Adagio cantabile

mp 3 *mf* *mp*

5 *poco string.* a tempo *poco string.*

10 a tempo *f*

14 *poco piu mosso* *p* *mf* *p*

18 *poco string.*

23 *poco rall.* ♩ = 60 Calmly *p* *poco string.* *mp*

27 a tempo *mp*

31 *mp* *sfz* *mf* *sfz* *f*

34 *mf* *p sub* *f*

37 *p sub* *mf* *f* string.

40 *rall.* *a tempo* *p sub* *f*

42 *poco string.* *poco rall.* *p* *mp* = 70

45 *p delicate* = 50

48 *a tempo* *mp* *p* *mp*

52 *poco rall.* *p delicate* *a tempo* *sfz* *attaca* = 50

♩ = 70 Suddenly grim and grotesque

55

mf

(play lower voice 2nd time only)

58

accel. e cresc. poco a poco through repeat until reaching

61

♩ = 108

♩ = 90 *Maestoso, a bit broader*

f *fpiu*

64

accel.

♩ = 120

f mp cresc. poco a poco

68

ff

71

♩ = 70 *Maestoso, a bit broader*

75

poco string.

a tempo

♩ = 60 *peacefully, poco rubato*

pizz. l.v.

mp

79

1. *sim.*

2.

mf

84 *poco rall.* $\bullet = 50$ Lovingly
arco *p* 3

89 *don't hurry*
mf *mp* *mf*

93 *p* *mp* *poco piu mosso*

97 *p sub* *mp* *poco rall.*

101 *cresc. poco a poco*
pp *p* *p* *mp espr.* *mf*

107 *molto rall.* *a tempo*
f molto espr. *p*

113 $\bullet = 60$ Calmly
p 3 *poco rall.*

116 *Slower and very delicate* *poco rall.*
p

119 *a tempo* *poco rall.*
p piu *pp*